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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/RSP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD -
ROBERT PALLADINO
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN'S WEEKEND TV
INTERVIEW, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION

1. Summary: As Taiwan dailies continued May 11 to cover the aftermath of President Chen Shui-bian's weekend TV interview, the focus also fell equally on PFP Chairman James Soong's planned meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao Thursday and next Saturday's ad hoc National Assembly election. The centrist "China Times" carried the newspaper's latest opinion survey on its front page, which showed that President Chen's approval rate has dropped from 44 percent in February to 39 percent. The popularity rate for KMT Chairman Lien Chan following his recent trip to China, however, surged from 31 percent in February to 47 percent. A poll conducted by the pro-unification "United Daily News" on its second page also showed similar results. According to the "United Daily News" poll, Chen's approval rate has plunged to 32 percent, the lowest since he assumed office in 2000. Several newspapers, including the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily and a long-time supporter of Chen, all spent their first few pages reporting on former President Lee Teng-hui's and the Pan-Green camp's criticism of Chen.

2. All the major Chinese-language Taiwan dailies carried reports on their inside pages on Soong's planned meeting with Hu Thursday. A page-four news story of the "China Times" headlined: "Soong-Hu meeting will define the 1992 Consensus," and a page-two news story of the "Liberty Times" said: "Tomorrow's Soong-Hu meeting will discuss the '1992 Consensus.'" Both the "Liberty Times" and the "United Daily News" also spent a whole page discussing the upcoming ad hoc National Assembly election and the "Law Governing the National Assembly's Exercise of Power," which is still stuck in the Legislative Yuan.

3. In terms of editorials and commentaries, several newspapers continued to discuss Chen's remarks made during his three-and-a-half hour TV interview over the weekend and his flip-flopping attitude. A "United Daily News" editorial said Chen launched strong attacks against former President Lee and in the meantime sought to redefine his plans to change Taiwan's name and to write a new Constitution. A "United Daily News" commentary said Chen's passionate remarks were an attempt to resolve his power crisis. A "Taiwan Daily" editorial, on the other hand, said that Chen's expose confirmed some previous speculations that the United States has indeed intervened in the China trips by KMT Chairman Lien and PFP Chairman Soong. Editorials of two limited-circulation, English-language newspapers, despite their different political orientations, all said that Chen has brought on himself most of the problems he is facing now.

4. Two newspaper editorials discussed the disputed ad hoc National Assembly election which will be held this coming Saturday. The "Liberty Times" said the election would offer Taiwan people a chance to become a normal and complete country if the constitutional revision concerning the popular right to referendum is passed. A "China Times" editorial also sought to clarify certain disputed issues concerning the ad hoc National Assembly election, saying that the move to include in the Constitution people's right to amend the constitution does not equal de jure independence. End summary.

1. President Chen's Weekend TV Interview

A) "Chen Shui-bian Launches Harsh Attacks on [Former President] Lee Teng-hui and Redefines Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform "

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 600,000] commented in its editorial (5/11):

". To criticize Lee at this time, Chen Shui-bian is actually moving towards redefining 'Name Ratification

and Constitutional Reform.' Chen would like to change the national title to "Taiwan" within three years. Chen stresses that if he cannot make the change, Lee Teng-hui could not do it either even if he were the president. Chen emphasized that "Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform" is not equivalent to changing the national title. In another abrupt turn, Chen said that when the national assembly is abolished, that is considered Constitutional Reform; When Chen added 'Taiwan' on the passports and included 'Taiwan' watermark on IDs, it is Name Ratification. This is Chen Shui-bian's new theory, 'Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform' is no longer a "cannot be done issue" but it is already done!

"Facing challenges from all sides, Chen Shui-bian at this time seems to have started his new strategy. On the one hand, paint an ugly image of Lee Teng-hui; Replace his previous title from 'Father of Taiwan' and 'Forefather of Democracy' to 'Undisciplined Old Senile.' On the other hand, redefine 'Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform.' Under the new definition, Chen Shui-bian will no longer be the betrayer to 'Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform,' but become an outstanding leader to make 'Name Ratification and Constitutional Reform' a dream come true! ."

B) "A-Bian's Passionate Act: to Counteract the Power Crisis"

Journalist Chen Ming-feng observed in the "United Notes" column of the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 600,000] (5/11):

". The public criticized President Chen for his fickle and unpredictable behavior. It is a matter of fact, after the "Bian-Soong" meeting, other than President Chen's harsh comment on Lien's China trip, Chen has swayed from pro-left to pro-right on the Cross-strait issues. But over time, the public can sympathize and understand the atmosphere within the DPP. In the five years since Chen was first elected President, society and Chen's motto for People's government and "the third path" have not met eye-to-eye. In fact, they have gone awry and many important political issues have become slogans to manipulate the voters. Even though the opposing parties cannot deny responsibility, isn't President Chen somewhat responsible?

"President Chen opened the door after the "Bian-Soong" meeting and their ten-point consensus. By having Soong pass a message during his visit to China, Chen does not have to bear alone the accusation of being a traitor or becoming too friendly with the communists. President Chen should know very well the reason for his changing behavior, perhaps it is a reflection of his defeat in the legislative election, or maybe pressure from the international situation. But can the DPP supporters understand? How can they accept that their past decisions have been crushed?

"The fact is that since the establishment of the DPP, it has experienced many civic-related activities and pro-independence events etc, but how much of the fundamentalist base is left? How many will ignore social and national security to insist on pro-Taiwan independence? There might be some but definitely not many. The queries pouring from within are really about President Chen's personal leadership and not only limited to Cross-strait issues.

"For Taiwan's interests, the fact is that the President leaning towards being neutral gives more opportunity for development in cross-strait relations. Once the two sides of the straits can resume talks, peace and economic prosperity will be possible. Whatever it is, President Chen must insist in reconciliation. The President must be able to put away his status and communicate with all parties, change his style of leadership to regain his credibility in order to resolve the crisis."

C) "Pan-Blue Legislators' Attempt to Block the [U.S.] Arms Procurement Bill Undoubtedly Proves that Lien and Soong Are Mouthpieces and Executors Acting on Behalf of China's Interests - President's Expose [at the TV Interview] Proves That the United States Has Obtained Lien's and Soong's Agreement with Regard to [U.S.] Arms Procurement Bill. Lien and Soong Must Clarify Their Positions."

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 150,000] commented in its editorial (5/11):

". President Chen's expose [during his TV interview

Sunday and Monday] also confirmed some reasonable speculations, namely, that the United States has indeed interfered in the China visits by [KMT Chairman] Lien Chan and [PFP Chairman] James Soong. Washington has obtained Lien's and Soong's agreement with regard to [the passage of] the arms procurement bill, and in return, it also helped Lien and Soong obtain the Taiwan government's endorsement for their China trips. This information has also more or less explained Chen's flip-flopping attitude toward the opposition leaders' China trips, which has truly upset his supporters. .

"The United States, on the one hand, hopes that both sides of the Taiwan Strait will resume dialogue so that they will not engage in military conflicts triggered by escalating confrontations. On the other hand, however, Washington is concerned that the Pan-Blue camp will tilt toward China too much and that would endanger the United States' strategic interests. The United States, as a result, conducted crisis management with Lien and Soong's China trips and in the meantime used this opportunity to seek to resolve the disputed U.S. arms procurement bill currently stuck in the Legislative Yuan. Washington's contact with Lien and Soong, as stated in Chen's remarks, has already proven that. .

". Taiwan and the United States, which will come to the island's rescue whenever there is a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, are the reasons for the active expansion and modernization of the Chinese military. Given its military strength, China is capable of launching a modern war against [Taiwan] and has posed a serious threat to the U.S. military's intervention in cross-Strait conflicts. This is a fact already widely acknowledged by military security specialists all over the world, and everybody is watching and concerned to see if Taiwan has the determination or capability of defending itself with U.S. assistance.

"Frankly speaking, the answer to this question is getting more and more uncertain following Lien and Soong's visits to China. Even the United States, which will likely assist Taiwan, has begun to wonder if [Lien's and Soong's China trips] will be the beginning of Taiwan tilting toward China politically. The U.S. conclusion to this question will significantly affect the United States' basic policy toward Taiwan, especially in terms of bilateral military cooperation. As a result, the U.S. arms procurement bill will, without doubt, has become a litmus test [for answering this question], which the Pan-Blue camp can no longer dodge. If the Pan-Blue camp attempts to block the arms procurement bill again, it will prove that the camp, under the leadership of Lien and Soong, is the mouthpiece and executor acting on behalf of China's interests."

D) "Chen's Isolation Is His Own Doing"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] noted in its editorial (5/11):

". As a national leader, Chen should not only have long-term goals and a comprehensive strategy for achieving them, he should also consult with nation in the decision-making process. But he seems to think he can see more clearly than others and can afford to ignore the people. We do not object to Chen seeking to improve ties with China, but he cannot be allowed to play fast and loose with Taiwan's security, or endanger Taiwan's sovereignty and the power of the people.

"The crisis that the present administration faces has been precipitated by Chen's increasingly domineering manner. He has now attacked former president Lee and the TSU simply to bolster his own policies - seemingly betraying those who have supported him and risking a split within the pan-green camp. Chen has brought most of these problems on himself. He should take the advice of former DPP chairman Lin Yi-hsiung and take a good hard look at himself."

E) "Chen May Pay a High Price for Unsubstantiated Charges"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/11):

". Chen's weekend TV interview was aimed at winning back hard-line independence supporters, who are reportedly planning to vote in the coming poll for his once staunch ally, the far-left Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), in retaliation for the president's mishandling of the mainland visits by Lien and Soong - trips they worry will cause Taiwan to lean toward China that in

turn may undercut their political cause. .

"Chen's fierce attacks on his opponents over the weekend, together with his impassioned talk of defending his policy, has attained an immediate effect of drawing attention away from a damaging internal party rebellion against him over his policy flip-flops. But it remains to be seen whether his remarks and moves to please the independence fundamentalists will be able to help his party to ward off widely predicted losses in the election.

"One thing, however, seems certain. That is Chen will have to pay a high price for his unsubstantiated charges against Soong and Lien. . Besides, Chen's open admission that the proposed referendum article is a ground rule for pursuing formal independence is likely to remind Beijing that the Taiwan leader has not lessened his push for a separate Taiwan republic because of its recent enactment of an anti-secession law.

"More fundamentally, Chen by fabricating issues without the backing of concrete evidence, once again has proved to the public that their president is a politician who might be willing to sacrifice social harmony or risk national security if he can do so to win elections.

12. National Assembly Election

A) "The Legislative Yuan Should Quickly Pass the 'Law Governing the National Assembly's Exercise of Power' to Facilitate Constitutional Operations"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 800,000] editorialized (5/11):

". Taiwan's current Constitution was created in China by the KMT regime and forcefully imposed on the Taiwan people. It is filled with the structure and operational logic of the Greater Chinese sentiment and also fails to uphold Taiwan's public opinion. As a result, to turn Taiwan into a normal nation through the efforts of constitutional amendments or re-writing a new constitution has always been a goal that the Taiwan people strive for. Even though the four constitutional revisions that these ad hoc National Assembly members, [who will be elected this coming Saturday], are tasked with may not really be able to achieve such a goal, the revision regarding including in the Constitution people's right to amend the Constitution will certainly hand the power of amending the Constitution to our people. In the future, as long as the route advocating Taiwan consciousness and sovereignty wins the support of the majority of the Taiwan people, Taiwan can evolve into a normal and complete nation via the popular right to call for a referendum. Most importantly, the Taiwan people will no longer be cheated by those 'self-deceptive' slogans of some politicians and can move their historical duties forward by themselves. Just because the move to include in the Constitution people's right to amend the Constitution will highlight Taiwan's sovereignty and show that Taiwan people are their own masters rather than slaves or servants of China, China regards the move as 'de jure independence' and intends to block the passage of such a constitutional revision by working together with the United States and Taiwan's opposition parties. ."

B) "Arguments over the Inclusion into the Constitution Popular Right to Referendum and De Jure Independence"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 600,000] commented in its editorial (5/11):

"The election of the ad hoc National Assembly members will be held this coming Saturday, . and its result will not only concern whether the proposed package of constitutional amendments will be passed, it is in reality also a test of the political parties' reputations and people's confidence in them. .

". From observations of this wave of Chinese fever interwoven with Constitutional amendments, the issues which most deserve further discussion and clarification are whether writing referendum into the Constitution would result in de jure Taiwan independence, and whether KMT and PFP's China fever means collaborating with the Communists to contain Taiwan and further endanger the ensuring of Taiwan's entity.

"Linking writing referendum into the Constitution with de jure Taiwan independence is one of the main appeals of the Democracy Action Alliance, which participates in the ad hoc National Assembly representatives' elections

and opposes the Constitutional amendment bill. The basis of the alliance's discourse is that once the Constitutional amendment bill is ratified and passed, the National Assembly will exist no more, and in the future when there are bills on territory change and Constitutional amendment, the bills will be ratified via referendum, and this constitutes what Constitutional scholars address as the so-called 'de jure Taiwan independence' problem, and this can result in Chinese Communist Party's fierce opposition, and will bring Taiwan into a dangerous situation of war.

"The Democracy Action Alliance's discourse opposing the Constitutional amendment bill also earns support from PFP, which openly endorsed the Constitutional amendment bill when it was passed in the Legislative Yuan last year, and the PFP also rationalizes the discrepancy between its earlier and current positions regarding the Constitutional amendment bill with the alliance's discourse. However, the PFP's position opposing the writing of referendum into the Constitution was criticized by President Chen Shui-bian in a TV interview the other day as Chen said [PFP Chairman] James Soong was using the position in exchange for the Chinese Communist Party's agreement for him to visit. Then Chen further pointed his finger at the Chinese Communist Party for interfering with Taiwan's Constitutional reform and stated bluntly that abolishing the National Assembly and writing referendum into the Constitutional Amendment bill is essentially making a new Constitution. Hence, the article on the writing of referendum into the Constitution is not only the language of electoral antagonism, but it has been upgraded into controversies over whether the Chinese Communist Party is interfering with Constitutional reform and whether the Constitutional amendment bill is essentially the making of a new Constitution. ."

". Essentially, writing referendum into the Constitution is just an improved procedure for Constitutional amendment ratification designed for the replacement of ratification by National Assembly, and it does not necessarily relate to de jure Taiwan independence, and it is tough to interpret it as essentially making a new Constitution. ."

"Another dispute that needs to be clarified is whether Lien's and Soong's China trips indicated that they have joined hands with the Chinese Communist Party to restrain Taiwan and whether such a move will endanger the construction and development of Taiwan's entity. The first thing that must be clarified is that what both Lien and Soong advocated in China was that they are against Taiwan independence, a position that is consistent with the Pan-Blue camp's position. But anti-Taiwan independence obviously should not be seen as tantamount to anti-Taiwan. In other words, each political party can have different views and ways to express their love and prospects for Taiwan. All the various options, including Taiwan independence, to maintaining the status quo, to unification, should be protected under the freedom of speech. ."

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